

In the Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A nucleic acid ~~encoding the α -chain of hepatocyte growth factor or an N-terminal fragment thereof~~ of SEQ ID NO:3, wherein least one of the codons of amino acids selected from the group consisting of codons at positions ~~33, 35 and 36~~ 3, 5 and 6 is CGT.

2. (Currently Amended) The nucleic acid of claim 1, wherein the codons of amino acids at positions ~~33, 35 and 36~~ 3, 5 and 6 are CGT.

3. (Currently Amended) A method for the production of α -chain of hepatocyte growth factor or an N-terminal fragment thereof (NK polypeptide) comprising the steps of a) expression of a nucleic acid of SEQ ID NO:3 encoding said NK polypeptide in a microbial host cell ; b) isolating of inclusion bodies containing said NK polypeptide in denatured form; c) solubilizing the inclusion bodies; and d) renaturing (naturation) of the denatured NK polypeptide, wherein in said nucleic acid at least one of the condos of amino acids selected from the group consisting of codons at positions ~~33, 35 and 36~~ 3, 5 and 6 is CGT.

4. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 3, wherein the codons of amino acids at positions ~~33, 35 and 36~~ 3, 5 and 6 are CGT.

5. (New) A nucleic acid encoding the α -chain of hepatocyte growth factor of SEQ ID NO:2 or an N-terminal fragment of SEQ ID NO:2, wherein in said nucleic acid at least one of the codons of amino acids selected from the group consisting of codons at positions 2, 4 and 5 is CGT.

6. (New) The nucleic acid of claim 5, wherein the codons of amino acids at positions 2, 4 and 5 are CGT.